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Abstract

Surveys the history of fiction production in the South Pacific as a process of creating new identities as print culture impinges upon oral traditions.

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8 **Shifting Identities: The South Western Pacific**

Paul Sharrad

Pacific identities have traditionally been marked as fluidly communal, interrelated to ancestors, open to emotional flows and confirmed through public performance. 'Artists' were often members initiated into guilds that taught covert magical meanings underlying overt material practice. Until the post-war era covered by this volume, there was no 'writer' from the Pacific. Becoming a writer was part of colonial and then decolonizing education, and included refashioning the self as an open communicator, an individual, a member of a modernizing nation. Broadly speaking, this process began with European landfall in Tahiti in the late eighteenth century and moved westward in phases through the nineteenth century until Papua New Guinea, the latest to develop widespread literacy, joined the global post-war push to decolonization. Its new university education linked with the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and publishing in New Zealand and Australia to produce the 'boom' in 1970s Pacific literature. The relatively short period of literary production, mainly produced through the classroom, means that being a writer has been mostly a case of being a poet or a short story writer rather than a novelist.

Before the 1950s, one or two people had written things, but a literary identity as 'writer' required several shifts from a sense of self defined by community and orality. One was a member of a family line, of a village, in some cases, of an island. One might be known as a good storyteller, but to be a writer needs training in literacy and a consciousness of some space to be crossed by means of that technology which

orality cannot adequately deal with. In the Pacific, the schooling that brought literacy was for a long time provided by missions, so a cultural shift away from traditional beliefs towards being 'Christian' and 'modern' was part of becoming a writer. Earliest published writings were conversion narratives (Joel Bulu, *The Autobiography of a Native Minister in the South Seas*, 1871; Clement Marau, *Story of a Melanesian Deacon*, 1894) or correspondence between convert missionaries in the field and their regional 'head office' (as in Ron and Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe's collection of Ta'unga's letters from New Caledonia to the Rev. Pitman in Rarotonga, *The Works of Ta'unga* 1984). Benjamin Umba's 'The Fires of Dawn' (1972, collected in Mike Greicus, ed. *Three Short Novels from Papua New Guinea*, 1976) tells a story of how the arrival of a missionary in the Highlands of New Guinea and the 'defection' to him by a son of the village is associated with an outbreak of disease and occasions violent reprisals on both the boy's family and the mission. The boy, Tanawa, as with many from village cultures valuing physical strength and the accumulation and distribution of material goods, takes up with the white man because he sees advantages in acquiring the tools of modernity. He has asserted his individual freedom, is well fed, and is able to give his old father 'a couple of blankets, some used china, a small knife, a ball and some other of the white man's goods', but knows he 'is trapped in a web of responsibility' that is at odds with all he is taking on besides access to such goods. The writer himself is an avatar of the conflicted Tanawa; he grew through this time to be educated in Catholic schools and enter seminary in Port Moresby. Umba's 'short novel' is typical of early Pacific fiction in carrying an air of transcribed oral history, and is referred to within the narrative as 'this story'.

Whatever the story itself says, participation in the new knowledge of the church brought with it a new identity of being part of a world-wide community and one that was a reading public. In many Pacific countries, in particular the eastern islands first converted and then co-opted into the missionizing effort, the church has been so influential that to be a modern Pacific Islander is to be also a Christian. Such an institutionalizing of faith creates both problems for those seeking to retain links to pre-contact belief systems, and discrepancies between 'official' rhetoric and actual social practice. Albert Wendt's novella *Pouliuli* (1977) and his teenage rebel characters Pepe and Tagata in *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974) describe the difficult, sometimes self-destructive attempt to hold ancient grounds of being up against Christian doctrine, and his novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979) shows how church life can be corrupted into material display and support for secular power. Sia Figiel also tackles this particular 'culture clash' of Samoan shifting identity in her book *Where we Once Belonged* (1996). Sam Lidimani Alasia's novel *Fata'abu* (2003) charts the history of one part of the Solomon Islands, ending in a triumphalist transition from internecine tribal warfare to peaceful Christian community, but the tale (part ethnographic history, part oral history, part fiction) implicitly shows the tensions in such a shift of identity. The narrative interest in dramatic conflict and the evident authorial intention to dignify indigenous culture clashes with the uncritically evangelical tone of the final chapters, in which the wise old 'chief priest' of the book's title gives place to the church pastor, just as the modern Western language used to describe traditional life jars with what we know would be different concepts and terms in real historical context. The clash is further indicated in the means of cultural change—the dramatic intrusion of labour recruiters, who take young men away to Queensland to work on sugar plantations. White guns, axes, and literacy are

prophesied as being too powerful for the old spirits to overcome, and the break between past and present is marked by geographical and cultural distancing of the younger protagonists as well as by the exchange of letters between Australia and Malaita. This rupture is later exacerbated by the sudden intrusion of Japanese and American forces during World War Two.

Many Pacific writings from the early phase of literary production take the form of 'auto-ethnographic' accounts of village life or the transcription of oral stories in which the separation of the writer is indicated sometimes explicitly, often implicitly in the external viewpoint of the narrative and its use of formal English to depict a clearly non-Anglo world. To become a writer, one had to enter school, and that meant learning not just maths tables and alphabets, but whole patterns of behaviour fitted to the subject position of 'student'. Stories tell of conflict between young men training to be warriors and teachers who force them into regimented docility. Moreover, to get more than a low level of primary education, students usually had to leave home and board at district high schools. This meant mixing with people from other tribes, sometimes with one's traditional enemies. A clear example of this situation can be found in John Saunana's story 'Riotous Soccer' (in Ulli Beier's collection, *The Night Warrior and other Stories from Papua New Guinea* 1972). A school football match turns into a brawl between student and staff referee, and between Malaitans and 'Polynesians' from the eastern islands of the Solomons. In Saunana's novel *The Alternative* (1980), developed from the story, Maduru twice leaves school because he feels his traditional male pride is damaged by the actions of white women in the school system. Of course, except in monolingual islands such mixed classes required a common language of instruction and under white colonial rule (with the exception

of some areas under French control) that was English. Again, getting access to new forms of wealth and power entailed separation from one's former self and one's village world. Nostalgic rehearsals of what was being lost formed the basis of writing in the classroom, and the letter became a viable mode of communication once one was separated from family and clan. In August Kituai's 'The Flight of the Villager' (*Three Short Novels from Papua New Guinea*), Iso flouts a traditional law and runs to Goroka and then Lae. He learns that having a letter of recommendation is the best way to get work as a 'hausboi'. Tali in the 'short novel' of the same name, is the son of one such domestic servant. He enters 'a new environment and atmosphere. This was the world of work and study and books, pencils pens, tubes, burners, atoms and whatever else you might name. He was in the serious world of education—all types of education.' When he returns to his father's village, he is a stranger and falls foul of the strict village laws about which girls one might dally with and when. He goes back to Rabaul and more school, receiving a letter with the news of his mother's death. Later, typing and filing in an office in town he receives another letter from his sister informing him of his father's death. After he marries and joins the army we see Tali reading a James Bond novel. Writing and reading go hand in hand with moving around and moving up in the modern, urban world, but also with alienation from one's roots. These examples can be matched by any number of Pacific stories: Paul T. Arnold's 'The Arrival' in the Greicus and Brash collection, *Niugini Stories* (1973), Ernest Mararunga's 'The Load of Firewood' in Albert Wendt's *Lali: a Pacific Anthology* (1980), and from Fiji, a story of nostalgia for childhood home after leaving a Methodist school for girls to go to a coeducational school in Suva and then fly to New Zealand for university studies. (Prem Banfal's 'I Remember, I Remember' in Albert Wendt, *Nuanua: Pacific Writing since 1980*, 1995).

My Mother Calls me Yaltep (1980) suggests that now no one else does call Ignatius Kilage that, and the writer trained as a Catholic priest in Papua New Guinea, beginning the 'novelised' account of his Highlands life with the break from village ways when his mother gets him baptised as spiritual protection against magic and he enters mission school. Kilage eventually ends up in Port Moresby as Chief Ombudsman and so writes as a modern, urban individual recalling traditional ways from a distance that is cultural, temporal, psychological, and spatial. This kind of autobiography-cum-social history is typical of many Pacific texts (Albert Maori Kiki, *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, 1968; Paulias Matane, *My Childhood in New Guinea*, 1972; Gideon Zoloveke, *A Man from Choiseul*, 1980; Tom Davis, *Island Boy*, 1992) and forms the basis on which contemporary Pacific fiction stands. These writings can be seen as accounts of shifting one's identity, often as a series of radical disruptions. Whereas the autobiographies are self-selecting success stories, creative fiction, coming as it often does from university years before success has been achieved, is less gilded. The creative writer experiences the struggle to make oneself over into a new person in isolation from the secure beliefs and customs of one's village world. He (in the first decades of Pacific writing almost all writers are male) knows the sorry fate awaiting the 'drop-out': drifting into shanty towns, too broke and ashamed to go home. (See, for instance Siuras Kavani's 'City Lights' in *Niugini Stories*, and Russell Soaba's 'Portrait of the Odd Man Out' in *The Night Warrior*.) Unlike his autobiographical elders, the university student has been educated to criticize the colonial system as well as to inherit it, to celebrate village culture while being dragged away from it. The selfhood that emerges is often a troubled, fragile

one. Writing can be a way to hold these tensions under some control while releasing some of their painful impact.

With that, the sense of oneself as alienated from the community, coupled with the Christian idea of personal salvation, generated the concept and feelings of privacy that accompany the writing subject. Church boarding schools segregated the sexes (as did many village societies), and love letters were often the first form of literate expression other than classroom exercises (Cheever 1851). 'Pulling the girls' remains a central theme in the largely masculinist Pacific cultures and is one means of continuing old ideals of manhood when fighting ability ceases to be a desirable attribute, but the 'love letter' and story writing shows how modernity makes courtship into a free-floating personal matter rather than (and often in conflict with) the set collective rules of village marriages. Male identity in particular seems a fraught, shifting terrain, boastful bravado turning to tearful despair, frequently projected outwards (and under the influence of alcohol) in violent attacks on women. This is particularly evident in the more fluid societies of the western Pacific, but can also be seen in Albert Wendt's Samoan epic *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* when Taulilopepe puts up a brutish front to hide inner fragility, and in the tough persona of Joseph Veramu's urban males in Fiji (*Moving Through the Streets* 1994). In that novel, one of the drug-addicted muggers starts his descent into the urban underworld when he is caught passing salacious letters to girls in high school; he goes on, despite high marks, to take a jaundiced view of climbing to success, alternating between macho attacks on women and self-loathing. In the end a mix of gaol and the church straightens him out.

Literacy, with its ties to Western schooling, presented Pacific Islanders with pictures of themselves in colonial adventure stories. Becoming a reader was to see oneself as an object of a technology owned by others (by R. M. Ballantyne, R. L. Stevenson, James Michener) but it was accompanied by training to be a writer and that offered the possibility of seeing oneself as a potential subject. In relation to the literature defining the Pacific up to the 1970s, the Islander realized a need to correct false representations and to assert the presence of a Pacific subject. Subramani's pioneering study *South Pacific Literature: from Myth to Fabulation* (1985, revised 1992) makes this counter assertiveness central to the Pacific literary project, as does Albert Wendt, who pungently declared, 'So much crap to unlearn!' in his essay 'In a Stone Castle in the South Seas' (1976b, 28). The escalated implementation of literacy under a conscious regime of training for self-government was a means of equipping oneself to become part of an urban-centred, state bureaucracy. People who left the village to seek their fortune were forced to enter the cash economy, to find work on plantations or in domestic service for colonial functionaries, or in colonial offices. The full-on encounter between the villager and the colonial world produces another shift in identity. The person with clan ties and village history becomes a nonentity, a cog in a system, who realises his identity is now 'native': *kanaka, boi*. Writing becomes a means of expressing this shift, venting one's anger at the accompanying awareness of racism and discrimination, and eventually protesting against it to a wider public, black and white. Meakoro Opa tells the story of a humble servant being humiliated by his impatient racist boss. The boss angrily snatches a broom away from the man, who closes his account, thinking,

A masta should be served first. But I wanted to be masta, too. He would not allow me to take the broom from him. ... Would I take the broom from him in some unknown future? ... Shall I kill him? Shall I beat him as he beats me now?

I shall kill him. Yes I shall kill his people. I shall kill to possess and take the broom from him as he took it from me in the past. (in Beier 1973)

In one of the most linguistically sophisticated pieces of early Pacific writing, John Kasaipwalova, who himself played a new role as a 'Black Power' student radical during his time at the University of Papua New Guinea, produces a dramatic account of student protest against prohibition on chewing betel nut at the airport. The students claim it is local culture and the law was not made by locals, so they do not recognize its validity. They score a minor victory over the white security officer and his black minions when their attempt to frame the students before the police fails. 'He Took the Broom from Me' and 'Betel Nut is Bad Magic for Aeroplanes' can both be found in *The Night Warrior*.

A new collective identity as 'native' born of a general movement away from village home brings together people of different clans (and in Melanesia, of different ethnicities and language groups as well) under one category, and 'the native' reconfigures itself as a potentially national subject. Until the 1980s, all Pacific fiction in English was produced as part of a decolonizing effort, by indigenous Islanders themselves and also by the work of late-colonial agents in the education system, conscious of the need to equip a new generation to take over self-government. The production of ethnographic tales of village life and legends in the diverse societies of

Melanesia was as much an effort to discover nation-wide commonalities from which to forge a national identity.

Sir Paulias Matane, grew from the son of a village magic-man to become a teacher, a politician, a diplomat, and eventually the Governor General of Papua New Guinea (a path prepared for him by novelist Vincent Eri). In the middle of his career he wrote inspirational stories for children and young adults. These went out on radio and were shaped up into novels. In *Aimbe the Challenger* (1974) the chapter headings are almost identical to Matane's triumphalist autobiography: At Home; The First White Man; I work for Mr Manki; I leave my Village; I go to Town; I Become a Member of Parliament. Young Aimbe starts life in the smoky hut of a mountain village where payback killing is rife. He boldly allies himself to the first Patrol Officer who visits the village because he wants to get access to white man's goods and the knowledge behind them, contracts himself to coastal plantation labour where he meets people from other tribes and forms a sense of common identity, realizes and then fights against various kinds of colonial oppression, and finally gets himself elected to parliament where he agitates for more schools, roads, and all the signs of modern progress. But at the end of the story he admits to a friend that he has no idea how his country will end up. The novel is an event-driven 'rags to riches' tale written from an outside perspective (despite the first-person narrative) with few subtleties of individual character. Aimbe is a pragmatist and single-minded, passing through his various roles with ease fuelled by ambition, and only pausing to be angry when he experiences unfair treatment. The book is a kind of synoptic report culled from conversations Matane has had with many people, and includes common tropes of the *kiap* (patrol officer) demonstrating firepower, the seducing white woman, the

plantation boss 'keeping his eye' *in absentia* on gullible workers by leaving his glasses behind to watch them. Oral anecdote becomes a written lesson in hard work and assertiveness preaching service to country (though motivated by self-interest), but with more practice than theory: Aimbe, despite his town councillor-sounding rhetoric, is a modern form of the old warrior, not a new intellectual.

Matane's fiction is much more confident in outlook than a lot of Pacific writing. In the more uniform linguistic and cultural communities of Polynesia, fostering national awareness was not the challenge it was in Melanesia, but across the region a common project of correcting dominant histories pertained. Vincent Eri's ground-breaking novel *The Crocodile* (1970) is paradigmatic in its depiction of a village boy seeking to gain advancement through mission schooling, experiencing work in the colonial town, being conscripted into the colonial labour force, telling his experience of the Second World War from a native perspective, and portraying the nascent awareness of a pan-New Guinean identity. Sam Alasia's historical novel *Fata'abu* does a similar thing for Solomons readers, noting both the 'Marching Rule' resistance movement that followed the War and the lack of recognition for wartime heroism on the part of local combatants. Like Eri, Joseph Veramu shifts the colonial representation of 'cargo cult' leaders as superstitious mischief-makers to prophet-intellectuals who try to make meaning of a new material world in the terms of an older spirit-based knowledge system. His *Black Messiah* (1989) fictionalizes a religio-political movement in Fiji, also showing how such leaders fall into corrupt practices when egotism overrides altruism. Albert Wendt wrote his Masters thesis on the Samoan history of resistance against New Zealand's administration, some of which found its way into his later fiction, especially *The Mango's Kiss* (2003). This went a step further in Melanesia,

with national characteristics being compiled into a catalogue of ideal traits supposedly defining a regional identity known as 'The Melanesian Way' (Narakobi). Such cultural nationalism could become narrowly prescriptive and a 'Pasifikwei' branding of identity exploited by complacent locals and venal politicians was satirized by Epeli Hau'ofa in his story collection *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983) and the subsequent novel *Kisses in the Nederends* (1987).

Nationalist models of identity to some extent conform at a macro-level to the collectivism of the village. The writer, as inheritor of the role of village orator—as bard, spokesperson, teacher, prophet—can fit into the new world as Matane and his characters seem to. However, as an individual, separated from the community by the very act of writing when most people still operate verbally, distanced by the level of education required to become a literary writer, when most people do not attain more than high school certificates and many not more than primary school, and isolated by the ideals of creative and critical imagination attendant on literary fiction when new nations are seeking cohesion and material development, the writer is also inherently at odds with the system, both in its traditional and modern guises. Prem Banfal's Indo-Fijian story 'I Remember, I Remember' is typical in that her small *Bildungsroman* leads her to realize racial inequalities (her final high school is mostly reserved for students of some white descent), to experience a collective national identity when Fijian students of all backgrounds travel abroad, and to become aware of a kind of psychic exile: 'a further estrangement from my father and a growing alienation from my own community [as I] tried to show my growing feelings of independence and the desire to assert myself as an individual in my own right.'

The effects of political exploitation of cultural nationalism were seen dramatically in Fiji in 1987 when the military, spurred on by a faction of Fijian chiefs, violently overthrew the elected parliament, ostensibly to protect indigenous rights enshrined under a colonial-sanctioned constitution. Satendra Nandan, Fiji-born of Indian heritage, was one of the urban leftist politicians jailed and then allowed to leave the country. Previously and latterly a professor of literature, Nandan produced the first of a series of fictive autobiographies reflecting on the breakdown of a multicultural nation, *The Wounded Sea* (1991). Implicit in this was the question of what exactly Pacific identity was, and how flexible it could be. In Fiji's case, national identity had been complicated by colonial introduction of Indian labour to work sugar plantations run largely by Australians under a British regime. Another professor of literature, Subramani, who also produced the first book-length academic study of modern Pacific writing, had already written a suite of stories about Indian indentured labour and modern restlessness, capturing the brittle atmosphere of anomie and violence amongst an 'exiled' underclass that is inherited by their upwardly mobile but rootless children. 'Marigolds' sums this up in its ending: 'A slow anguish grips my heart, the anguish of being unsupported. Everything, history and custom, had prepared me for this impasse. There is no alternative life: a hundred years of history on these islands has resulted in wilderness and distress.' (*The Fantasy Eaters* 1988). This history is also fictionalized in a more upbeat way in J. S. Kanwal's *The Morning* (1992). Here we can see how the personal alienation of the writer can assume the dimensions of collective existential anguish and cross with regional or communal identities at odds with new national unity. The particular economic and cultural tensions in Fijian society also found equivalents in Papua New Guinea. A local self-determining art and co-operative movement in the Trobriands caused writer John Kasaipwalova to be

taken to court, and the secessionist war that broke out in Bougainville found expression in a novel by Regis Stella, *Gutsini Posa (Rough Seas)* (1999).

As these instances of internal conflict suggest, after liberation from colonialism there was a brief period of celebration followed by introspective analysis. National identity was all very fine, but did it put more food in everyone's stomach? Was national pride a cover for ongoing cultural and economic dependence on first-world countries? Was national identity strong enough to override more intimately held identities: ethnic, religious and linguistic? Writers as agents of the nationalist anti-colonial project now found themselves in an uncomfortable position. Truth-telling to white foreigners shifted to telling home truths. In the Tongan-based comic allegory, *Tales of the Tikongs*, Epeli Hau'ofa figures the artist as Manu, a vagabond clown who exposes what everyone gossips about but won't speak of in public. Both he and Sia Figiel in her first two books, use marginal figures (in her case, children and a student radical returned from New Zealand) to show how self-congratulatory island nations are client states, culturally sold out to western television shows and consumerism, and economically reliant on old colonial masters for aid and remittances. The particular exilic consciousness of the Indo-Fijian writer became a common expression of identity for all Pacific writers who were not silenced or completely consumed by the nationalist programme. In this latter case, the identity of a person as 'writer' was for a long time confined to 'one-off' creative successes as a path to 'more serious' employment writing government documents or teaching English as a pragmatic means of getting on in a modern materialistic world. Those who continued to make themselves into serious writers of fiction faced particular challenges.

To have a sustained career as literary writer, and to have the time to develop the early spread of short stories into novels, one generally needed ongoing employment and access to a reading public. In the Islands, that meant work in the few major universities in the region, where often embattled literature departments could serve as centres of literate culture. This carried with it the idea of writer as teacher, but also continued to promulgate the role of intellectual as social critic, the gadfly to sting the collective conscience. With a very limited local readership, and national governments and traditional chiefs alike not wanting to have young writers questioning their ways, serious literary artists tended to internalize the existential crises of their characters and, while taking the moral high ground, toppled into an abyss of anomie, lamenting their fate as ‘prophets without honour’. In the more isolated institutions of the Pacific, such a vision persists. Russell Soaba refused the role of protest writer promulgated for some time at the University of Papua New Guinea and stuck to his own vision of necessary but socially ineffectual integrity. In his memorable novel *Wanpis* (1977), Soaba satirizes the young products of mission boarding schools who seize on university education as a new means of material advancement and political power. The true artist-intellectual becomes something of a wanderer, cut off from, but faithful to his village roots, not aping white ways or imported black radicalism, not subscribing to education as just a meal-ticket, not immune to blotting it all out like everyone else with some binge drinking. A depressing vision of people as ‘the waste on the roadside for someone’s long, bitumen highway, always flowing forward to civilisation’ (ch 2) is offset by an internal wrestling match to discover a basis for self-determination:

a closer look at his self can easily reveal that he is a pretentious village nut! So in his self-rejection he is rejecting the self that is not his. And the result after the absence of his particular self, which is Christianity, is his original self which is void, but an emptiness that is filled by fruitless nostalgia for the traditional past. (ch 1)

The thinker-artist resists becoming an empty *lusman* by holding to some inarticulate vision of essential moral probity and the collective good—finding a gloomy but sustaining existential self-pride that is defined by the title of the novel. The same kind of isolated selfhood for the artist is envisaged in Albert Wendt's early expressions of a nihilistic void that he later converts into something more complexly indigenous and philosophical. It finds its echo still in Steven Winduo's story collection set around Port Moresby, *The Unpainted Mask* (2010). Even in this sometimes despairing sense of the artist being ahead of his time or just irrelevant to the national agenda, the writer's identity as socially committed guide continues to hold sway, and social realist public critique such as Florence Syme-Buchanan's 'Boat Girl' is a regular feature in Pacific fiction. A more subtle blend of traditional moral fable and criticism of modern ways can be found in Vianney Kiantata Teabo's Kiribati story 'Abatekan'. Wendt both upholds this public role for writers and gently mocks its pretention in his story 'I Will Be Our Saviour from the Bad Smell'. (All these stories are in Wendt's *Nuanua* anthology).

As a form introduced in the nineteenth century and emerging locally mainly in the mid-twentieth century because of colonial intrusion, fiction in the Pacific is imbued from the start with the vision of flux and fragmentation that is modernity. The self as something alienated and in movement is not altogether a modern, Western,

phenomenon. Pacific selves were always already in motion. In the eastern half, there is the long tradition of voyaging and inter-island marriage that Florence ‘Johnny’ Frisbie introduces into Pacific literature with her foundational travelogue/ diary *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* (1948) and another Cook Islander, Tom Davis (Pa Tuterangi Ariki) fictionalizes around the history of one ocean-going canoe in *Vaka* (1992). This ideal suggests a Pacific identity as open and adaptable in a positive harmonious way. The more settled cultures of the western Pacific also present the idea of a mutable self taking up new opportunities, but it is a more unstable, conflicted representation. A representative sample is found in Rexford Orotoloa’s *Suremada* (1989), in which oral sketches—versions of legends, village anecdotes and invented sketches—are erratically pulled together into a ‘novel’ by a young narrator centring his stories on those of his uncle, a roguish trickster who shape-changes from villain to hero to fool. Unlike Davis’s magisterially solid epic, *Suremada* and its characters threaten to come apart at the seams. But as the narrator wryly points out at the end, it makes for lively storytelling.

One shift in Pacific identity as reflected in its contemporary literature is from sexist patriarchy to woman-centred being. There is a very long way to go in many Pacific communities before gender equity is realized, but in literature the foundational example of Florence ‘Johnny’ Frisbie provides inspiration for women. Attainment of higher education and influential jobs by women and the influence of global feminism, has increasingly produced critiques of sexism and strong women protagonists in fiction. Women have always played a significant role, if only because they have been feared by men as possessing the power to ‘unman’ them through sexual magic or by causing loss of mana. A man’s duty is to protect the women of his family, and he can

wax highly sentimental over his mother, but the role also allows him to disregard and even abuse those he protects from others. We see something of this in Albert Wendt's *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree* and its reworking in *The Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, where young Pepe's hostility to his father stems from that man's poor treatment of Pepe's mother and sisters, but Pepe himself then goes on to seduce Susannah, shame her family, and treat her shabbily when they marry. Men are the centre of Wendt's Samoa, but in response to social change and critics, he goes on to place a modern globetrotting woman at the centre of his novel *Ola* (1991) and to investigate the connections between the fight for racial equality and the need for gender equality. Russell Soaba goes back to his village roots in *Maiba* ([1979] 1985) to tell a parable of how a rejected girl grows up to play a part in saving her people from violent tyranny at the hands of some self-appointed political toughs. There are more women writing poetry than prose, perhaps, but 'One Saturday Morning', an early story by Vanessa Griffen (in *Lali*) gives a nicely modulated 'day in the life' account of a young girl in Suva. Marjorie Crocombe, who was an influential promoter of Pacific writing at the University of the South Pacific, founding the journal *Mana*, wrote some short stories set in the Cook Islands (two appear in *Lali*). Two significant novelists in recent times stand out. Sia Figiel's books (*Where we Once Belonged* 1996, *The Girl in the Moon Circle* 1996, and *They Who do Not Grieve* 1999) expose the violence and hypocrisy within sexist Samoan life from the point of view of girls and young women. The Tahitian writer resident in Australia and writing in English, Celestine Hitiura Vaite, has produced a trilogy (*Breadfruit* 2000, *Frangipani* 2004, and *Tiare* 2006) that depict with pointed but more gentle humour the woman-centred world of Papeete. A selection of contemporary women writers of fiction can be found in *Niu Voices* vol.1, edited by Selina Tusitala Marsh (2006).

The location of that collection and its writers in New Zealand indicates the other major shift of identities in Pacific Island writing: from national to regional and to 'hyphenated'. Outmigration to metropolitan centres for education and work that permits sending remittances back home, is a feature of modern Pacific life and is producing settled Pacific minorities in New Zealand, Australia, and the west coast of America. This has the positive effect of putting writers in touch with the machinery of publishing and with larger audiences of readers, but carries new challenges for negotiating distance from one's cultural and geographical roots as well as identity maintenance in the face of a majority 'white' culture in which 'multicultural' literature is sometimes dominated by Asian voices and competes with indigenous literatures as well. Protest at discrimination against 'migrant' groups here shifts identity to 'ethnic' on the one hand and on the other moves some towards a pan-Pacific collectivity. The often uneasy hybridity of life in the 'overseas' metropolis is reflected in the multiform social realism and symbolist verse of John Pule's *The Shark that Ate the Sun/ Ko e Mango ne Kai e La* (1992). Reminiscent of Russell Soaba's disaffected urban prophets, Pule's narrator is a drunken poet who alternately provides a gritty social realist account of working-class migrant life at the edges of Auckland, an imagined history of colonial contact in his native Niue, and existentialist ravings seeking some grounding for his own self. Pule's world is echoed in the unstable characterization and narrative of Regis Stella's *Mata Sara: Crooked Eyes* (2010), which records the sojourn of a group of New Guinean students in Sydney.

Though the dynamics of anti-colonial assertion in literary cultures are similar across the world, the different timings and local political circumstances mean that

comparisons must be carefully attentive to specificities. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the global alliance of indigenous peoples connects the Pacific with many other cultural sites (see Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Rope of Man* [2005], for instance), and that the decolonization of the Pacific, particularly in its 'boom' of the 1970s and early 80s, occurred in dialogue with social movements in Africa, the US, Australia and New Zealand, and played a part, if only through the impetus to postcolonial studies in universities, in later movements in Canada and elsewhere. (For a few years, the Canadian journal *True North Down Under* covered literary production from all the countries discussed in this volume and promoted a Pacific awareness.) However, while getting a school education in the Pacific meant increasing separation from village home and traditional culture, it generally did not entail the kind of forced abduction experienced by indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada. The degree of white penetration of Pacific society (with the important exception of Hawai'i) was also far less extreme than in those countries or New Zealand, though in the Western Pacific we have to remember the sudden and direct traumatic impact of industrialized global warfare that other parts of the Pacific did not experience. These differences have played a part in shaping distinct cultural dynamics and textures of identity in each locale.

A case can be made for a subtle network of relationships in which the Pacific has played an active part. There is no doubt that Australian publication of material for Papua New Guinean schools (through Oxford University Press, Cheshire and Jacaranda) led to interest amongst Australian readers and positive interactions with Aboriginal writing. It might be said to have also induced a subtle alteration of Australian self-perception, showing readers that its governing of PNG was not a

benign paternalism: more a rough bonhomie masking white racism and exploitation (as shown in Eri's *The Crocodile* and Trevor Shearston's fiction). Pacific writing reflected an Australia that was not uniformly white, having its own black population, including Pacific Islanders 'blackbirded' to work on sugar plantations (as depicted in fiction by Sam Alasia, Nancy Cato and Faith Bandler). In New Zealand, again the late-colonial catering for island and immigrant students led to Pacific books circulating within New Zealand and interacting with the growth of Māori writing, as well as to New Zealand publishing Pacific writing (notably under the auspices of Longman Paul), helping to generate a regional awareness of the islands as cultural sites. Nonetheless, the identity of the Pacific writer remains primarily national and regional. With the New Zealand exceptions of Keri Hulme's *The bone people* [1984] (because of its Booker win) and Witi Ihimaera's *Whale Rider* [1987] (because of the movie), no Pacific Island writer has attained international standing in the way that Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Peter Carey or Patrick White has, though Albert Wendt and Patricia Grace come close. The small island 'talk-story' communication and low-level economy of many Pacific countries mean that writers remain focused on local identities and restrained in their capacity to build their own identity as 'writer' by lack of readers and markets. It is in the growth of a younger generation of pan-Pacific diaspora into hubs such as Auckland, Honolulu and the American West Coast that identity as 'P.I.' (Pacific Islander) and as 'writer' becomes increasingly viable, although that also involves the modulation into complexities of 'hyphenated' and 'minority' identities. Litia Alaelua's story 'Ghosting' is but one example of this new kind of identity exploration (in *Nuanua*). This is the path that Albert Wendt's writing tracks as it shifts ground amongst explorations of Samoan tradition meeting Western modernity (*Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree*, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*,

Pouliuli, The Mango's Kiss), troubled scholarship boy in New Zealand (*Sons for the return Home* 1973), globetrotting Samoan woman (*Ola*), urban hybrid community in opposition to corporate globality (*Black Rainbow* 1992), or comfortably trans-Pacific (*Ancestry* 2012).

For writers themselves, the sense of exilic anxiety pervasive earlier, while still a defining characteristic in some quarters, has been gradually dispersed by diasporic access to wider horizons and pan-Pacific networks. One indication of this shift in writers' identity is that despite the internal complexities of modern life in island nations, there is a perceptible lack of irony in much Pacific writing. Those writers who have closer connection with centres of literary production, who have secure professions and/ or experience of expatriation (Hau'ofa, Wendt, Figiel, Vaite) have a subjectivity that can encompass contradiction and plurality and adopt a wry humorous or sardonic attitude. New wealth in some countries and new generations of diasporic, university-educated Islanders have produced a shift towards a more positive outlook and variations of style as people working outside of the universities take up creative expression and young writers inhabit the role of the modern 'artist' with a stronger sense of its viability in the increasingly pervasive print culture of a globalized Pacific.

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